UNDER THE STARS

FLORENCE MORSE KINGSLEY

UNDER THE STARS

Under the Stars—Frontispiece.

"'A SAVIOUR, WHICH IS CHRIST, THE LORD.'"

See page 31.

Under the Stars

BY FLORENCE MORSE KINGSLEY

·FOUR·STORIES·FROM·THE·
· · · · ·LIFE OF JESUS

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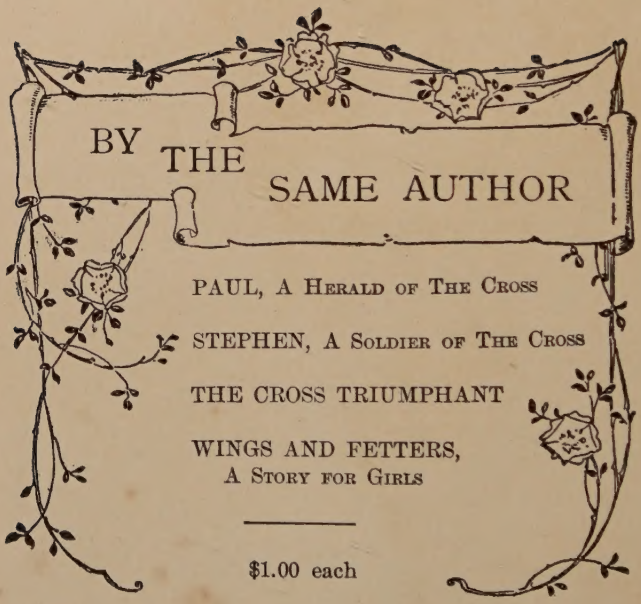

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A WATCH IN THE NIGHT

BETHLEHEM.

UNDER THE STARS

I

A WATCH IN THE NIGHT

AS far back in his short life as Adriel could remember he had longed with a great longing to keep the night vigil with the shepherds. Every evening he watched his father and older brothers making ready their wallets and looking well to their weapons of

defence preparatory to the perils of the darkness. And every morning he awoke with the birds to welcome them as they came home gray with frosty dews and hungry for the morning meal.

"Why may I not go with them?" he urged again and again. And as often his mother made answer, "Thou art but a lamb thyself; it is in the warm fold that thou must bide in the cold night watches."

"But truly, my mother, I am no longer a child," he pleaded. "Have I not already nine years? And have I not thrice beaten off the pariah dogs from the yearling ewes as I kept them by day?"

"Aye, the lad shall go with us," said his father, a gleam of pride in his stern eyes. "It is of such stuff that men and warriors are made. And Jehovah hath sworn that Israel shall yet have need of men and of warriors." With that he heaved a great breath and turned away.

Adriel lifted his head proudly. He knew right well that his father spoke of the promised

deliverance of Israel. "I am already a man," he told himself; "I will also become a warrior. Then when Messiah shall come—The Wonderful One, Prince of Jehovah, King of kings—I will do as did the mighty men of old. I will fling myself into the swift-rushing stream in the

"RUTH HAD ONCE GLEANED AMONG THE SHINING FIELDS."

valley below, and having passed it I will kneel all dripping at his feet and cry out, 'Thine am I, O Holy King, and on thy side, thou Son of David!"

In the valley that stretched fair and smiling before his dreaming eyes, Ruth, the faithful

Moabitess, mother of the chosen line, had once gleaned among the shining fields. And upon the very hills where his own young feet now wandered, royal David, himself a shepherd lad, had watched his flocks.

Yonder, too, near the gate of Bethlehem, gushed the cold, clear water of the fountain, the water for which the warrior King had longed so sorely in the heat and dust of battle. Adriel's eyes sparkled as he thought of the three mighty men of Israel cutting their triumphant way through the hosts of savage Philistines to fetch their brimming helmets to their prince.

"Dost thou think that Messiah will come soon, my father?" he asked eagerly, as they followed the slow-stepping flocks to the hill-pasture.

Hazaiah shook his gray head. "Nay, child, how can I tell thee? It is already a long time since the promise was spoken—a long, long time, and Jehovah's ways are not our ways, and his times are hid from the wise. Surely the night is dark over Israel. Yet if it be the darkest hour then is the day star at hand."

Under the Stars.

"THE WATER FOR WHICH THE WARRIOR KING HAD LONGED."

The child was still thinking of the promised Prince, while his father, who was head shepherd, made all needful preparations for the safety of

"THE HOLY SACRIFICE TO JEHOVAH."

the sacred flocks. For these were no common sheep, fit only for food for the toiling multitudes, they were the flower of a hundred flocks,

chosen with priestly care and ceremonial, and set apart for the holy sacrifices to Jehovah in the great temple at Jerusalem.

Adriel sat down as he was bidden in the shelter of a great limestone rock, drawing his cloak of camel's-hair more closely about his shoulders, for the night wind blew cold from the valley below, bringing with it wandering wreaths of mist from the surface of the stream which brawled loud and complainingly in the night silence.

The child gazed dreamily about him, at the slow-moving masses of the flocks, at the hills rising high and dark against the mysterious depths of sky alive with the sparkle of countless stars, at the rugged walls of the Migdal-Eder, the flock-tower, his eyes resting at last upon a yellow gleam of light high up the rocky steep. Adriel knew that the light was that of a lantern swinging before the entrance to the village inn.

"There be many strangers in Bethlehem tonight," quoth Dan, the oldest shepherd of them

all, as he settled himself comfortably beside the lad. "The khan yonder is crowded."

"Why are there strangers in Bethlehem?" asked the child, his eyes still fixed on the twinkling light. It was not nearly so bright (he thought) as the great star which hung above it.

"They are here for the taxing," said Dan, frowning till his frosty brows met. "I and every mother's son of us must pay of his hard-earned wage that the heathen king may drink from a golden cup."

Adriel was silent for a moment. "These things will not be when Messiah comes," he said, slowly.

"When Messiah comes!" echoed Dan. "Aye, lad, those will be days! And 'tis in Bethlehem yonder that the Prince will first see the light.

"Look you, boy," and the old man thrust his shepherd's crook into the soft earth that he might have both hands free to deal with his subject. "Once, when I was in Jerusalem at passover time, I heard the great Rabbi Joachim

tell the people what should come to pass in the days of the Messiah. Attend, and I will set the matter in order for thee, for I am of kin to a rabbi myself, and therefore have no small skill in teaching.

"In the first days when Messiah shall come to his own, there shall be a great slaughter of the enemies of Israel, such as never was since the world was created, nor shall be again. The mountains shall be red with the blood of the heathen, so that the robes of the Prince shall be dyed purple like the skins of grapes.

"In those days Jehovah shall gather into one place the holy mountains, Sinai, Tabor, and Carmel, and he shall establish Jerusalem upon them. The city shall be so great that it shall reach even to the gates of Damascus; its gates shall be thirty ells long, and as wide, and they shall be builded of pearls and precious stones. Its houses shall tower into heaven, and every house will appear even as a jasper stone, clear and sparkling."*

*Old rabbinical legends.

Under the Stars.

"THE OLD MAN THRUST HIS SHEPHERD'S CROOK INTO THE SOFT EARTH."

The child drew a long breath of pleasure. "Shall I be there?" he asked, wistfully. "Shall I see the King?"

"Art thou not of the seed of Abraham?" cried the old shepherd. "Aye, thou shalt be there—thou shalt see Him—if only thou behold the day of His coming." He broke off with a sigh, his eyes fixed upon the drowsy flocks which wandered slowly in the starlight, or slept huddled into quiet groups, the mothers with their little ones, in the soft, chill grass.

Adriel was looking at the great star which hung over Bethlehem. It seemed to the child that it pointed a long, shining finger of rosy fire down through the night. "Tell me more of the King," he said, dreamily.

The old shepherd raised his dim eyes to the star. "The King shall reign over his people," he said, slowly. "And it shall come to pass in the city that the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing.

The ransomed of the King shall return; they shall come to Zion with songs and everlasting joy upon their heads!"

"Aye!" broke in the deep voice of the chief shepherd. "They shall obtain joy and gladness, and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

After that the stillness was unbroken save for the sighing of the night wind and the quiet movements of the flocks as they cropped the young winter grass. Adriel's eyes drooped; the rosy light of the star seemed to enfold him soft and pleasant as his mother's arms. Then on a sudden—or was it all a dream?—the light flashed white and wonderful, over groups of straying sheep, on dark hills, on the misty valley, on the startled faces of the shepherds. In the midst of the light—or so it seemed to the child—was the figure of a man, clad in garments of dazzling whiteness. Yet was the glory of his raiment as nothing to the glory of joy that shone upon his face.

"Fear not!" said the angel, and his voice was as the voice of many waters. "Fear

Under the Stars.

"THE FIGURE OF A MAN CLAD IN GARMENTS OF DAZZLING WHITENESS."

not! for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people!

"THE BABE WRAPPED IN SWADDLING CLOTHES."

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger." And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and singing, "Glory to God in the highest! And on earth peace, good-will toward men!"

Then the earth shadows dropped again like a black curtain between life and death. But the star shone on.

"Come, let us go that we may see the Prince!" cried Adriel, plucking his father by the sleeve. For the chief shepherd stood as if turned to stone staring up into the familiar heavens where the strange star was shining.

Then with all haste they climbed the steep hill to Bethlehem where the smoky lantern of the khan twinkled faint and dim. And there, wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger, even as the angel had said, they found the child.

"He shall be called Wonderful," said the chief shepherd, bowing his white head before the new-born Prince. "Son of Jehovah, King of kings. aye, the Consolation of Irael!"

But Adriel, trembling with joy at the smile in the eyes of the mother, reached out his little brown hand and touched for an instant, ever so softly, the tiny rosy hand of the sleeping baby.

"A Saviour," he murmured, "which is Christ, the Lord!"

THE CHILD IN JERUSALEM

JERUSALEM.

II

THE CHILD IN JERUSALEM

THE lamb — a pretty creature, innocently white and soft, its nostrils and ears showing pink amid its snowy fleeces, bleated piteously as the man lifted it to his shoulders.

The man, tall, dark, grizzled, yet withal of a certain benign and reverend aspect, looked down with a thoughtful smile at the lad who stood at his side.

This lad, more than a child, less than a man in stature, was possessed of a countenance inde-

scribable. One might say that the pure oval of his cheek glowed with the sun-kissed olive of southern Palestine; that his eyes were clear and deep, like crystal pools reflecting the age-long beams of distant stars; that his hair fell about his shoulders a cloud of passionate light; that his mouth was strong, tender, sweet, yet touched with a mysterious prescience of infinite sorrow. But alas! when all has been said, one cannot see him as he was.

"Thou shalt come with me to the temple," said the man, after a pause, "that thou mayst witness the solemn paschal sacrifice. Thou art now 'a son of the law,' and so must thou perfect thyself in all things pertaining to the law."

The boy had fixed his large, gentle eyes upon the lamb, which had ceased its struggles and lay submissively across the broad shoulders of its bearer. His small brown hand stole upward and rested tenderly for an instant on the soft white head, then he followed the long strides of the man in silence.

Jerusalem was thronged from wall to wall

with pilgrims; and outside the walls also, in the winding valleys of Kidron and Hinnom and on the gentle slopes of the surrounding hills, were they encamped by the thousand thousands, their tents and booths of wattled branches interwoven with leaves nestling in every available nook and corner.

As the man, Joseph, and the child passed through the crowded streets their ears were filled with the hum of countless tongues, speaking in every language under heaven.

And not all were pilgrims; merchants, squatted cross-legged in their stalls, blatantly besought the attention and patronage of the devout; water carriers cried aloud of the waters of Jerusalem, of the sacred fountains of Zion, pure as the heavens, cold as the dews of midnight; beggars, lame, blind, or sick with loathsome diseases, thrust their hands imploringly into the faces of the passers-by.

Once the two were crowded back against the wall of the narrow street to make way for a platoon of Roman soldiers, from whose burn-

ished shields and spear-points the sun struck sparks of dazzling splendor. Joseph's brow contracted with righteous anger as the advance guard swept his mailed arm rudely against the child, bidding him back, on pain of his life!

"Aye, the heathen exalt themselves," quoth a white-bearded Jew from the wilderness, who had observed the action. "When Messiah shall come, son of Abraham, what thinkest thou, shall these things be?"

Joseph lifted his eyes to the great white towers of Hippikus, Phasælus and Mariamne, which looked down upon the sacred city, the visible sign and seal of the iron power of Rome. "When Messiah shall come," he responded with a sigh—"but how long, O Lord, how long!"

"The time is at hand!" cried the other, exultantly. "This, thy little lad, may yet march in the victorious armies of the Prince."

Then the impatient multitude surged back into the space made vacant by the vanishing soldiers, the friendly Arab drifting away on its current, while Joseph and the lad pressed steadily on

towards the temple. They presently found themselves in the midst of a great throng of pilgrims, evidently bent upon the same errand as themselves, for every man bore a lamb upon his shoulders. These innocent babes of the flocks

"LIFTED HIS EYES TO THE GREAT WHITE TOWERS."

filled the air with loud, tremulous, insistent beseechings.

Now three mighty blasts of the ram's-horn trumpets announce the opening of the gates. The waiting crowds sweep in, the loud chorus of the Hallel, chanted by the attendant priests,

mingling with and subduing the piteous plaints of the paschal lambs:

> Praise, O ye servants of Jehovah,
> Praise ye the name of Jehovah!
> Bless-ed be Jehovah's name
> Henceforth and forever!
> From sunrise unto its setting
> Prais-ed be Jehovah's name!

Joseph, with the lad, had been among the first to find entrance into the holy place of sacrifice; the lamb, presented in silence for the ceremonial inspection, is pronounced clean, without spot or blemish, according to the law, while the chanting bursts forth anew in a loud wailing chorus:

> The cords of death encompassed me,
> The pains of hell gat hold upon me,
> I found distress and trouble.
> Then called I on Jehovah's name,
> "Alas, Jehovah, deliver my life!"

The lamb had ceased both its struggles and its complainings, its innocent eyes were dim with fear, its innocent throat outstretched; a quick flash of the priestly knife, a bright flow of life-

blood into the golden bowl of sacrifice, and the paschal lamb was slain.

> Return, O my soul, to thy rest!

rang out the pleading voices—

> For Jehovah hath requited me.
> For thou hath delivered my life from death,
> Mine eyes from tears, my feet from falling.

Like one in a dream the child beheld the blood poured upon the altar, the strange, prophetic words of Isaiah sounding in his ears above the loud halleluias of the worshipers. "He was oppressed, and he was afflicted, yet he opened not his mouth: he was brought as a lamb to the slaughter; and as a sheep before her shearers is dumb, so he opened not his mouth."

Did the child Jesus divine even then the age-long mystery of the paschal sacrifice!

Did strange, mysterious questionings visit that innocent soul, so girt about with heavenly intelligences, as he witnessed the solemn details of the feast that followed; the haste and silence; the care lest a bone of the innocent victim should

be broken; the stakes of pomegranate wood thrust crosswise through its tender body; the unleavened bread, the bitter herbs, the blood-red wine of sacrifice, mingled with water, in "the cup of blessing"?

The feast was eaten after the old, old custom; the old, old questions were asked and answered, and few of all the myriads of feasters in and about the holy city but spoke with his neighbor of that later and greater deliverance promised Israel with the coming of the long-awaited Prince of Peace. And, lo! that Prince was in their very midst, lifting up his childish voice in the mighty exultant hymn of thanksgiving:

> Praise Jehovah, all nations!
> Laud him, all people!
> For mighty is his love upon us,
> And the truth of Jehovah eternal!
> Hallelujah!

Midnight in Jerusalem, the blackness made visible by the red flare of myriads of smoking torches; a dull trampling of countless beasts of burden; cries, blows, execrations, passionate dis-

putes; the shrill wailing of children; anxious voices of women calling, beseeching, urging; a

"THE FEAST WAS EATEN AFTER THE OLD, OLD CUSTOM."

mad, hurrying, tumultuous flood of humanity, now surging in dense masses between breathless city walls, or pent beneath black, stifling arch-

ways, only to pour with rapid, resistless tide through the yawning gates, gradually to broaden into peaceful streams and rivulets in the wider darkness without.

On the crowded highway a woman suddenly stopped short, straining large, anxious eyes into the night. "My child!" she cried, tremulously; "where art thou, O my child?" And again and again, "Where art thou?"

Shrill voices answered her out of the dark, but his voice answered not.

"My child is lost," she said; "we must return and make instant search for him."

"My beloved"—and the man who walked at her side laid his broad palm soothingly over her trembling fingers—"surely, the child is with our kinsfolk, who tarry because of the throng."

"But if an enemy hath dealt foully with him," murmured the mother faintly. "Thou hast not already forgotten—"

The man was silent for a moment, then he spoke, slowly, emphatically, and with frequent pauses: " 'Behold, they are dead which sought

the young child's life. Return ye unto the land of Israel.' It is the word spoken unto me by the messenger of Jehovah. The child is precious in the sight of heaven; and shall he suffer hurt in this holy city of Jerusalem?''

The woman listened attentively, but she trembled the more at his words, though why she knew not; nor could she understand how it was that the fateful words of Simeon, spoken long years ago, but never forgotten, sounded perpetually in her ears like a cry of woe.

Nevertheless she went her way submissively with the others of their company; but at the dawn when they looked carefully for the lad among all the straggling groups at the wayside they found him not.

''He is with our acquaintance, who yet tarry behind us on the road,'' quoth Joseph, confidently. ''We shall find him at the noontide encampment.''

But they did not find him at noontide, nor yet at evening when the pilgrims gathered for the evening rest. And when the matter was noised

abroad many of the women of Nazareth gathered themselves before the tent of Joseph and Mary, his wife, to condole with them.

"Alas! daughter of Abraham," quoth certain of these, rolling up their eyes and wagging their heads dolorously, "the lad was too wondrous good for humble Nazareth. An evil eye hath lighted upon him; or a beast hath trodden him under foot; or perchance he hath sickened by the way; or, again, thieves have stolen him away in the darkness. Alas, alas!"

But Elizabeth, the mother of John, when she heard what had befallen, came to Mary and spoke strong words of comfort and cheer. Also she reminded her of the wondrous words of the angel: "Thou shalt call the child Jesus. He shall be great, and shall be called the son of the Highest. And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there shall be no end."

And Mary arose in the strength of that word and went with Joseph all the way back to Jerusalem, asking of every one by the way: "Hast

thou seen a little Nazarene lad, breast-high, wearing a garment of white wool, with an abba also, striped with blue and white?" And one said that he had seen no such lad, and another

"'THOU SHALT CALL THE CHILD JESUS.'"

that he had seen him riding on a camel with a wild man of the desert; and yet another declared that the lad had passed that way five days before with a company of Egyptians.

And when they were come at length to the city, they went to the house where they had lodged during the days of the feast, but no one there had seen the child. And there also they found many tongues to tell of the dangers of Passover time, and of divers evils and misfortunes which had befallen the child of this one or of that in days past. The neighbors also came by twos and threes to offer counsel, and to stare at the white face of the mother and the bowed head of the father, hurrying home again to count their own children with jealous care and joy.

"We will go up to the temple that we may lay the matter before Jehovah," said Joseph, at length; "for there is neither comfort nor wisdom in man's words."

And Mary, silent and despairing, rose up from her place, and the two went up to the temple, that they might lay the matter before Jehovah.

There were not many in the court of the women that day, for the matrons and maids of Jerusalem were busy setting their houses to rights after the great influx of Passover visitors;

therefore it was that a certain venerable rabbi saw the mother of Jesus as she prayed, imploring the mercy of God with tears and sobs. And

"AND THE LAD HATH TARRIED WITH US NOW THESE THREE DAYS."

when she had done praying and had risen to depart, being strengthened and comforted of her sorrow, he asked her why she wept as she prayed.

And she said to him, "Sir, I have lost my son, and though his father and I have sought him carefully and with tears these three days we have not found him."

And the rabbi answered her: "Is the lad breast-high, ruddy, and well favored of countenance, and doth he wear a garment of white and an abba striped with blue?"

"Oh, sir, it is he!" cried Mary, clasping her hands; "I beseech thee to tell me where he is."

Then the good rabbi told her that on the day after the feast a young lad, a stranger, had come into the schools of the rabbis, which also were held in the temple. And when the master of the school asked him who he was and whence he came, he made answer that he was called Jesus, and that he had come to his Father's house to learn of his Father. "And the lad hath tarried with us now these three days," continued the rabbi, "both asking and answering questions, amazing us every one with his understanding and wisdom."

Then Joseph was called, and the three came to

Under the Stars.

"'SON, WHY HAST THOU THUS DEALT WITH US?'"

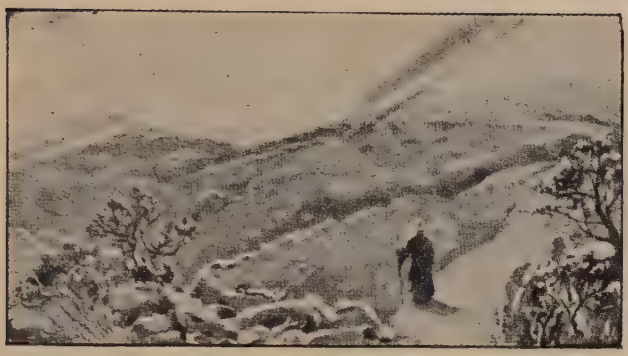
the place where the great rabbis and masters of the law were accustomed to teach the young sons of Israel, and there, seated upon the ground, in the midst of a circle of men, both wise and reverend of aspect, they found the child, his great eyes shining with solemn joy.

When they were come out of the temple his mother chided him, albeit in all tenderness, saying, "Son, why hast thou thus dealt with us? Behold, thy father and I have sought thee sorrowing."

And he made answer, "How is it that ye sought me? Wist ye not that I must be in my Father's house?"

"But they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them. But his mother kept all these sayings in her heart."

THE ONLY SON OF HIS MOTHER



THE HILLS ABOVE ESDRAELON.

III

THE ONLY SON OF HIS MOTHER

PERCHED half way up the hillside, and overhung with green branches like a linnet's nest, was the house; little and low and old, its moss-grown, earthen roof, gay in springtime with myriad blossoms, which flaunted their gay silken heads in the soft air. Later, the great plain beneath would send up parching heats, and the steady, unwinking stare of the sun would parch the clay roof till it was bare and brown as the active hands of Elizabeth,

who toiled from dawn until evening in house and garden.

Far below lay the vast level stretches of Esdraelon, studded with blossoming groves and orchards, and flecked with wandering droves of cloud-shadows. Above straggled the steep, irregular streets of the village, half hidden among luxuriant gardens and vineyards, and guarded by an ancient wall, ruinous and decayed, but still boasting the dignity of a gate on the east and one on the west. These gates were duly opened at sunrise and closed at sunset, to the satisfaction of the inhabitants, who had thus maintained the name and state of a city through uncounted generations.

To Elizabeth, cheerful and busy in her own little nest of a house, with its well-ordered garden, its triple rows of grapevines and its half score of olives and pomegranate trees, it mattered little that a daily miracle of beauty was performed before her eyes; the wide meadows of Esdraelon, green as lucent emerald in the warm springtime, russet and gold in summer,

and purple with brooding mists in the bleak winter days, held for her but one interest. Her child was there. Ira, the son of Elizabeth, was scarce more than a boy; yet he had done man's work for the rich vintner, Resen, for the space of six and thirty moons.

"He is a well-grown lad—is my son," Elizabeth would boast to the women who gathered at the fountain with their pitchers, "a well-grown lad, and industrious beyond belief. Find for me a thistle in my bit of a vineyard, or a weed in my bed of herbs! Come, I will pay any one of you a silver penny for a single leaf! And never a farthing piece of his wage that does not find its way to my hand!" Then she would nod her head and show her white teeth with a smile of pride and joy.

As for the neighbors, they did not grudge a word of praise for the lad. Was he not the only son of his mother—and she a widow? He was a handsome boy, moreover, with a ready laugh like his mother's, and was well liked on his own account. Already there was talk of a marriage

betwixt the widow's son and Arnon, the prettiest maid in the village. It was reported that the matter of dowry was as good as settled, and that Arnon would be sewing the wedding talith before winter.

"It is true that I have been sorely afflicted," Elizabeth was wont to add at such times; "more, I may say, than any one of you." This last with a mournful pride as of one who has been distinguished and set apart in a notable manner. "Who of you all, I ask, has bewailed a husband; and after him—one—two—three sons, and a daughter? Rachel, yonder, can tell you that my eyes were all but blind with weeping, and my voice gone from me with shrilling for the departed. For all left me in a twelvemonth, treading, as it were, upon one another's heels in their haste to be gone. Then there was but the one, Ira, and he a wailing morsel of a babe. I had scarce spirit to hold him in these arms."

"But he was always a fine child!" put in old Rachel, wagging her withered forefinger. "Did

I not tell thee even in those days that all was not over for thee?"

"Thou hast spoken!" cried the widow exultantly, her quick-glancing dark eyes filling with

"WATER HAD BEEN TURNED INTO WINE."

tears of joy; "there was never a finer child from the first day of his breath until now. I have said a thousand times—and I say it once more in presence of you all—that Jehovah hath requited

me. Now what, may I ask, can many children advantage one if they be lean and sickly, or if they be forward and disobedient, idle, and given to wine-bibbing and gluttony? Is not one like to my son better than a score of such?"

In the fields of Resen, the rich vintner, the widow's son toiled from dawn until evening every day, except the Sabbath day, and he pleased his master right well. If any lingered in the pleasant shade of the tamarisk trees in the hot noontides beyond the appointed time, the vintner might be sure that the son of Elizabeth was not among them. Yet it was true that it was sometimes difficult for one to fall diligently to work at the exact moment when the black shadow of the noonstone fell athwart the green withe set up by Resen to mark the limit of the rest hour. And this more especially when the mighty Ben Hazar was relating marvelous legends out of the Talmud and the Mishna; for Ben Hazar was of near kin to a rabbi, and therefore had learning.

Many of these strange stories had to do with

the long-expected Messiah of Israel, and young Ira's heart beat loud in his bosom when on one

"LEPERS AND PARALYTIC FOLK HAD BEEN HEALED."

such occasion Ben Hazar assured them that the great rabbi, Ben Jothan, his kinsman, had de-

clared in his hearing, not three moons since, that there were rumors abroad in the regions of Galilee of a strange new prophet, one Jesus of Nazareth, who had performed wonders beyond the power of mortal man. Water had been turned into wine at a wedding feast in Cana; lepers and paralytic folk had been healed; devils, both dumb and speaking, had been cast out, with other marvels past the telling.

"It is still a question," Ben Hazar had added, pursing up his mouth judicially and frowning—as was the manner of the rabbi, his kinsman—"as to whether this man Jesus is not himself devil-possessed; of a strong and superior demon, assuredly, and therefore able to dominate the lesser forces of evil at work among men. I have myself known a sorcerer—one Simon Bar Jesus, who, by means of an unguent curiously compounded of the fat of new-born babes and the ashes of holy men dead thrice three hundred years, was able to cure the evil eye."

"Did this man, Bar Jesus, heal lepers also?"

demanded Ira, his brown cheeks flushed crimson with excitement.

Ben Hazar drew his grizzled brows together. "I never heard that he did. For myself, I must needs look into this matter of the Nazarene with my own eyes. To-morrow I shall not come to the vineyard; I shall go instead to Capernaum. The man is there to-day, to-morrow, and it may be longer. Assuredly I shall have the worth of my wage if I but behold a miracle!"

"And thou wilt see him?" whispered the lad, half under his breath. A sudden desire had sprung up in his heart, potent, irresistible. If only he might see this wonderful man—this Jesus of Nazareth! He resolved to lay the matter before his mother.

In the garden that evening when the sun had sunken behind the violet range of mountains, and the great fertile plain of Esdraelon lay at their feet a dusky sea, touched here and there with furtive twinkles of light, like faint reflections of the solemn stars which burned in the blue depths overhead, Ira told his mother of the

man, Jesus of Nazareth. "I wish to see him, mother," he said, when he had repeated all that Ben Hazar had related under the tamarisk trees. "Let me go to-morrow to find him; he is in Capernaum."

Elizabeth threw up her hands with an exclamation of displeasure. "Capernaum!" she cried. "Surely thou art losing thy wits, son. Capernaum is more than a day's journey from here—more than a score of miles!"

"But I could go and return, my mother, betwixt dawn and evening," pleaded the lad. "If only I might see him!"

"Think no more of the matter," interposed the woman, raising her voice. "Have I not boasted myself openly that my son is no idler; and shall I see thee waste a whole day—nay, more likely two—and lose thy wage, that thou mayest run after a sorcerer? Not so."

Then observing the boy's downcast face, and bethinking herself that he was no longer a child, and that she was in truth no more than a woman, and therefore the lawful inferior of a man—

however young—she went on in a tone of beseeching:

"Listen to me now, son of my soul—for al-

"'BUT ONLY A CARPENTER.'"

though I am but thy mother I have yet a little wisdom, together with much love. I also have heard of this Nazarene; at the fountain he has

been spoken of, and in the market-place. He is not Messiah, but only a carpenter, the son of a carpenter, who has worked with his hands for many years.

"Nay, he is no more and no better than thou art, lord of my house! These are but idle tales; Ben Hazar is a purveyor of great, swollen fables, as all the world knows.

"Hear, also, what I shall tell thee, son; I have in the strong box within—how much, thinkest thou? A hundred pence — lacking but seven pieces! When the seven shall be added I go straightway to the mother of Arnon and demand her for thee. And now wilt thou idle away two —three days, to run after the son of a carpenter, eh? Bring me the seven pence, lad, and thou shalt have a holiday indeed!"

Ira looked down at his strong brown hands in silence. He loved his mother; also he had a great, though secret, tenderness for the beautiful young maid of whom his mother had spoken. Yet stronger than either—though why he knew not—was this new-born desire to see the wonder-

ful stranger. Seven pence — and they stood betwixt him and a sight of Jesus of Nazareth!

On the following morning he found Resen, the master of the vineyard, in an angry humor. "That lazy animal, Ben Hazar, is again absent!" he cried. "Sacred blood, but I could beat him with this staff till my arm dropped at my side! And who now will haul up the buckets from the river to-day—and the vines parching with drought?"

The labor of hauling up the heavy buckets with the slow-turning windlass was terrible; the absent Ben Hazar was a giant in strength, and performed it easily. The other laborers eyed the motionless wheel stolidly; no one offered himself for the task.

Resen frowned more angrily than ever. "Lazy hinds, all!" he cried loudly, turning his back upon them. "And ye know right well that the wage is double what ye can earn amongst the vines."

Ira started forward. "Two pence?" he asked timidly; "is it two pence that thou wilt pay?"

Resen regarded him sourly. "Two pence—yes; I have said it. Canst thou do it?"

"Yes," said Ira firmly; "I will do it."

Some of the others shrugged their shoulders as they turned away. They knew that Ben Hazar received four pence for every day that he worked from dawn until sunset. But this, in truth, concerned none of them.

The work was hard, terribly hard. Before noon the boy's hands were blistered, and every fibre of his young body ached with fatigue; but the thought that in four days he should be the possessor of eight pence nerved him to the task.

"I will have a holiday," he said to himself; "I will find Jesus of Nazareth." Also he thought shyly of Arnon, with her soft black eyes, and her cheeks, brown and softly dimpled like the shifting surface of the fountain. Only seven pence between him and all this happiness!

That night he was too weary to eat his supper, and afterward tossed and moaned loudly in his sleep, so that Elizabeth crept into his chamber thrice to lay her cool fingers on his forehead.

Under the Stars.

"ARNON, WITH HER SOFT, BLACK EYES."

"It is the heat of the sun," she murmured anxiously. "He ought, perhaps, to rest a day in the shade."

But the next morning found the lad eager for his task. "I must make haste, my mother," he said, smiling into her troubled face, "to fetch the seven pence. Afterward, remember, I am to have a holiday."

"A holiday!" cried Elizabeth; "ah, so sets the wind! Aye, a holiday and a bride for thee, son of my soul; garlands, also, and feasting—even the feast of betrothal!"

It was this, she thought, which ailed the lad and kept him from sleeping quietly as was his wont; and her glad fancy ran nimbly forward into the years which lay before. A betrothal; a wedding—ah, such a wedding, with dancing and music and feasting! and the whole village at the doors to praise and bless the bride and throw handfuls of flowers and parched corn at the feet of the handsome bridegroom. Later there would be the sound of children's voices in the little house; sons and daughters once more under

the old roof. "Truly Jehovah hath requited me," she sang. "I will praise him with my whole heart!"

Meanwhile, Ira, in the damp, exhausting heat of the plain below, toiled ceaselessly at the windlass. As the slow hours passed, the creaking chain sang in his ears a strange song, and the figures of the laborers, passing and repassing among the serried ranks of vines, loomed up vast and unsubstantial as the figures in a dream.

"Dolt, thou art no longer filling the buckets!" shouted Resen, angrily, raising his staff. Then he swore a great oath and stood stock still, staring with bulging eyes. The straining figure at the wheel wavered and sank sidewise to the ground; the creaking chain rasped and spluttered harshly in its rapid descent to the river while the clumsy wooden handle of the windlass, thicker than a man's arm, smote the prostrate figure twice—thrice—four times with a dull crash.

They stared at him stupidly as he lay motionless in the hot sunshine, a thin stream of blood

making its slow way amongst the parched and dusty weeds at their feet.

"Why do you stand there like dumb cattle?" cried Resen, recovering himself of a sudden. "You are my witnesses that this day's work is none of my doing! Pick him up, you, Dan and Jashan! Take him away to his house."

And so they brought him to his mother. He breathed through that day and night, slowly, painfully. At dawn he opened his eyes; they were misty with swift-approaching death. "I shall see him!" he cried faintly; and with the cry his soul passed.

Elizabeth had sat at his side through the long hours like a statue—soundless, motionless. But at the voice of that cry she fell forward on her face.

At the hour betwixt high noon and the setting of the sun on that same day, as was the custom, they carried him forth to his burial. His young face, upturned to the blue sky, was both sweet and smiling; on his heart lay three lilies,

dropped there by the fairest maid in all the village, Arnon, her dark eyes swollen with weeping, and all the dimpling laughter fled from her brown cheeks. Beside the green-garlanded bier tottered Elizabeth, blind with grief, crazed with anguish. "My son, my son!" she moaned feebly, the strident shrilling of the flutes and the mournful wailing of the women falling unheeded on her dull ears.

Down the long, straggling street of the village passed the little procession; and all the people, both young and old, beholding it, burst into loud cries of grief, and, dropping their various vocations, followed the corpse.

"Alas! alas!" they cried. "Alas! for the young man in his strength! Alas! for the tree cut down before the day of his fruitage! Alas! for the desolate woman! Surely Jehovah hath smitten—hath stricken her; with sore affliction hath he bowed her to the ground, like a vine that is withered!"

And now befell a strange thing—assuredly the strangest thing in all the weary tale of earth's

Under the Stars.

"'YOUNG MAN, I SAY UNTO THEE, ARISE!'"

sorrows. Uncounted mothers have wept despairingly over their dead. During unnumbered centuries have blue summer skies looked down upon the living as they fold their dead away in darkness. Yet on this one day, as the mourning villagers passed from out their eastern gate along the dusty highway which led to Capernaum, another procession met them. Life eternal and death confronted each other there.

As to what followed, was it not writ long ago in the annals of an ancient Book? These are all the words of it:

And it came to pass that he went into a city called Nain; and many of his disciples went with him, and much people. Now when he came nigh to the gate of the city, behold, there was a dead man carried out, the only son of his mother, and she was a widow: and much people of the city was with her. And when the Lord saw her, he had compassion on her, and said unto her, Weep not.

And he came and touched the bier; and they

that bare him stood still. And he said, Young man, I say unto thee, Arise.

And he that was dead sat up, and began to speak. And he delivered him to his mother.

As for the words which he spake, who was thus called back from death unto life, who shall speak them again? And of his life, long since finished among the green hills of Palestine, what meant it thenceforth to the widow's son? Did the youths and maidens of the village fear him as he walked among them with his deep, wise eyes? Did human loves and hopes and ambitions seem but vain and paltry things to one whose lips had pressed the awful chrism of immortality? Not so: *He gave him back to his mother!*

And to every one of us who have loved and lost will he likewise one day restore our own. For he will meet us on the road of our mortal anguish, and he will have compassion on us and will say unto us, "Weep not!"

THE CHILDREN'S BREAD

6—*Under the Stars.*

TRAVELERS FROM THE SYRIAN BORDER.

IV

THE CHILDREN'S BREAD

"THE end of the matter is this, the child hath a devil!"

"No; ah, no, good Asclepia, the child is yet weak and ill by reason of the fever. And look, she is still now, quite still—yes, sleeping."

The older woman cast a frowning glance about the hut, then she leaned forward and laid a withered finger on the cheek of the unconscious child. "There is no heat here," she said decid-

edly. "Draw now the curtain from the doorway that I may see."

The mother of the sick child obeyed. "Too much light, good wise-woman," she ventured timidly, "is bad; is it not so?"

"For what am I called Asclepia?" answered the other, darkly, staring hard at the small, wizened figure which lay motionless on the mat at her feet. "Look, you! I have said the child hath a devil; again I say it—behold!" and she pointed triumphantly with her long, bony finger to a faint purplish stain on the waxen forehead of the child. "It is the mark of the demon!"

"No, no, kind Asclepia; 'tis only a bruise; the little one fell yesterday in the fever-fit while I was forced to leave her to fetch water from the fountain."

Asclepia straightened her tall, gaunt figure with a grim laugh.

"Thou art but a poor creature—the sport of the furies," she said contemptuously; "the gods hate thee, it is plain; thy husband slain in battle,

thy kindred perished of the plague, and now thy child.

"Look you," she continued with an air of relish, "thou knowest not the ways of devils; but I, Asclepia, the wise-woman of Lebanon, know them right well. What say you to this, woman: the son of Marsyas, the rich wine-merchant of Sidon, only breast high, fair and ruddy of countenance was he, not four moons ago; then the red sickness seized upon the child, and at the moment when it left him weak and empty, the black soul of the malefactor, Baladan, lately crucified at Sidon, entered in its room. The lad never spoke again, but the soul of the malefactor tore him night and day till the breath left his nostrils. Aye—woe! woe!"

The sick child started up with a sharp, echoing cry, her wide, black eyes glassy and staring, her mouth distorted horribly, her limbs convulsed and writhing. Maia caught the little tortured body in her arms with a moan of terror. "My child," she wailed, "my little babe! See, mother is here! Nothing shall harm thee!"

"The devil is tearing her," quoth the wise-woman, complacently, arranging her veil as if to depart. "Now here is counsel for thee.

"Find thee a live bat; make it fast to the post yonder with a cord of scarlet; then bind the child beneath it, also with cords of scarlet, and beat her naked body with wands of the black willow till the foul spirit within cries out for mercy. Do not thou heed, but ply the rods with all diligence till the mouth of the child ceases to cry; then immediately do thou loose the bat; the devil will have entered it. So haply shalt thou deliver the possessed."

"No—no! I will not—I cannot!" cried Maia sharply, hugging the wasted body of the child closer to her breast. "She would die under the rods. She hath already suffered—ah, suffered, suffered! She could not bear it—she would die!"

Asclepia shrugged her shoulders. "Better dead than devil-possessed," she said loudly. "Well, then, thou hast paid me my price; I must

do what I can. Pay good heed to this wise saying of a sage of Egypt.

"Take of the live coals from under the pot, seven; bind two to the soles of her feet, two in the palms of her hands, and three over the heart, being careful also to hold a red cock near to the mouth while the flesh burns.

"What! Thou wilt not? Why, then, didst thou call Asclepia to thy counsel? Go thy way, sport of the furies; gorge the child with milk and sweets; warm it soft in thy bosom; speak gently to it—aye, cherish the foul spirit within. It will remain till the breath pass, well pleased. But her death be on thine own foolish head."

The child moaned and trembled at sound of the strident voice. The mother caressed it passionately. "Hush, thee, flower of Lebanon," she whispered brokenly, rocking herself to and fro; "thou art faded—yes, but thou art my all—my all. Sleep, little white flower! The gods in mercy grant me the evil thou art suffering. I am strong to bear it, whilst thou—"

She gazed into the small, withered face upon

her breast, slow tears of speechless anguish scalding her worn cheeks. "The babe is bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh, great Asclepia," she faltered, looking up piteously into the frowning face of the wise-woman. "Beat me, I beseech of thee; burn me; it will suffice."

Asclepia laughed aloud. "I would beat thee gladly for a fool," she cried, scornfully, "but no rod hath grown out of the earth fit to purge thee of thy folly. May the brat live to tear thee!" With that parting word of comfort she turned quickly and was gone.

For a full hour after the departure of the wise-woman Maia sat holding the child, who had sunken into the death-like stupor which fell between the paroxysms of her disorder as black, quiet nights divide days of tempest and ruin. Which was most awful and heart-rending Maia knew not. She stared with hot, tearless eyes at the still terrible face, leaden-hued and pinched into a ghastly semblance of unlovely old age. This piteous face, with its blackened lips, its withered flesh, its purple, distended lids, could it

be that this was the face of her child—her little, laughing, rosy Halie, dimpled and soft and flower-smooth to the touch of her hand?

"Better dead than devil-possessed." The words sounded in her ears, a voice of doom,

"THE BLEAK MOUNTAIN UPLANDS."

awakening grim, sleeping memories of her own childhood days; awful, naked spectres, haunting the bleak mountain uplands, seen from time to time flitting phantom-wise along the edges of black precipices, their mad laughter mingling with the roar of swift torrents, or wandering

and wailing under sad winter moons amid the rock-hewn tombs of the valleys; ever death-pursued, yet never dying; driven to and fro unendingly, like the restless, eternal mists of Lebanon.

She laid the child gently upon its bed and turned blindly away. Better dead—dead—dead. The words beat in upon her brain, harsh, like the clang of the temple gong at time of sacrifice. She tottered to the door.

"Ah, my Maia, it is thou? I have had thee in my heart all the day, little neighbor. How fares it with the little one?"

Maia looked up vacantly, her dry lips moving soundlessly.

"She is no better, then?" continued the soft, caressing voice. "Sit down for a while here in the shade and taste this posset of goat's milk; there is for the child also a plenty—and so cooling and good, ah, thou canst never guess till thou hast tasted."

Maia turned away with a deep sob of utter misery. How weak was human sympathy.

The newcomer raised her brows with a look of mingled pity and perplexity, then she laid her small brown hand softly on the bowed shoulder. "Asclepia has been here!" she said, suddenly. "I saw her pass, muttering and scowling like the cruel witch that she is. I could beat that woman! Yes; it is true that I believe her a meddlesome, wicked, greedy, lying—ah, I cannot say how I hate her! What now if she casts an evil eye on our little ones that she may coax our coins into her hungry pouch?"

Maia lifted her face from her hands; it was white and drawn. "Asclepia told me," she whispered hoarsely, "that my child, my Halie, hath—a—devil."

Eirene grew pale; she drew away from the half-open door with an involuntary shudder. "But it is not true," she began slowly; "I cannot believe—"

Maia sprang to her feet. "Go!" she cried, her eyes blazing; "thou art afraid—afraid! Afraid of my baby—my little, innocent lamb! Thou wouldst turn her naked into the night and

the cold to wander and wail among the cruel stones. But I shall kill her—dost thou hear? I shall hold her little throat with these two hands till the tortured breath flies away to its rest!"

Eirene's large, mild eyes grew dark with horror. "Thou art mad with grief!" she said, loudly. "Listen! There is a Jew yonder whom the devils obey! Yes, it is true; my husband heard it in the market-place!" Maia was staring dully at the ground; she seemed not to have heard.

Eirene seized her by the arm. "The Jew hath already healed multitudes of blind, fever-stricken, lepers, palsied; yes, it is true! I came to tell thee. Devils flee away at his word. Go to him. I—yes, I—will remain with the child."

"Where?"

"Yonder in the village of Creusa. Follow the highway; ask for the Healer—but no—I cannot remember the man's name. No matter; go quickly—go! Delay not!"

For once in its long, drowsy history the tiny village of Creusa was in a ferment of excite-

ment. Travelers on foot and on horseback from every part of Galilee, from Phœnicia, and even from the remote Syrian borders, thronged its narrow streets, chattering, gesticulating, questioning.

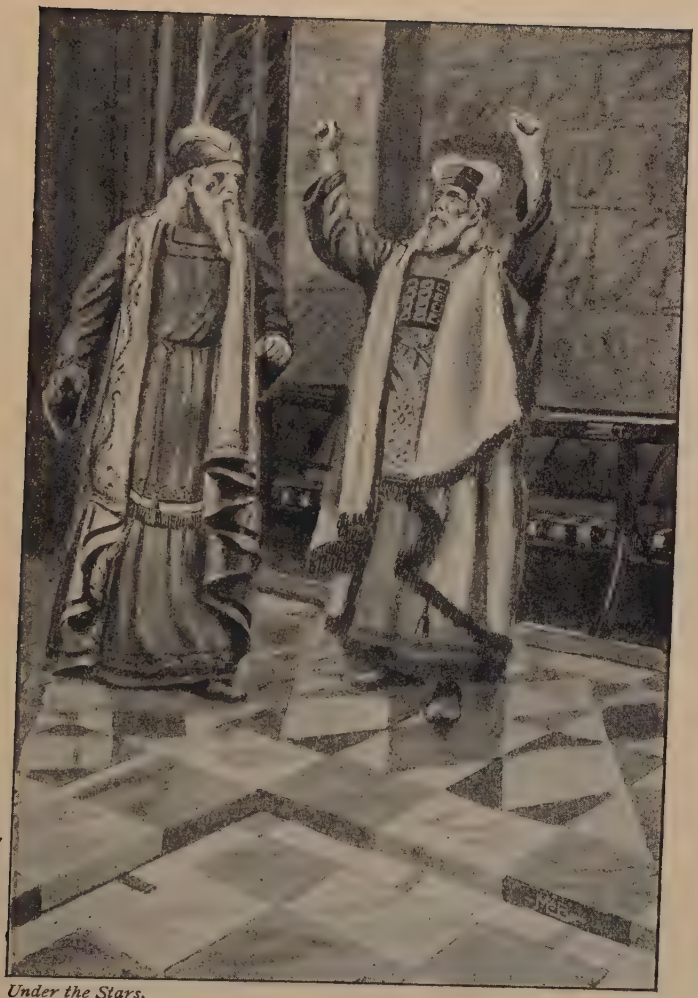
"'THERE IS A JEW WHOM THE DEVILS OBEY.'"

The amazed inhabitants, squatted in the doorways of their earthen huts, or digging stolidly amid their little patches of vineyard, realized at length that something beyond the common had happened.

There were indolent rumors afloat among them. It was said that the strangers—Jews, plainly enough—who had entered their village after nightfall two days ago were none other than the Nazarene Prophet and his followers.

The wiseacres shook their heads dubiously; the man was ill-spoken of in high places; he had doubtless fled to the north from justice. He was a dangerous man; a disturber of peaceful customs; in league, it was affirmed, with dark, awful powers of earth and sky; capable, if offended, of causing fires, earthquakes, famines, plagues. He could also heal, if so minded, divers incurable ailments—in itself a suspicious circumstance; hence this mad multitude, this tumult of strange voices, of loud, wailing cries, of insistent questionings.

"The Healer is yonder, in the house of the Jew, Ben Hazar," quoth Abas, the water-carrier, stolidly. He had answered the question more than a thousand times since dawn. He did not look at his questioner; he was thinking that it would be a good thing if the Prophet should



Under the Stars.

"THE MAN WAS ILL-SPOKEN OF IN HIGH PLACES."

remain in Creusa, his leathern pouch being for once pleasantly heavy with coin. "A vineyard," he began aloud, jingling his gains gleefully, "and a score of— A plague on thee,

"HE HAD ACTUALLY SUPPED WITH PUBLICANS AND SINNERS."

woman! Did I not say in the house of Ben Hazar? Canst thou speak with the Jew? How can I tell thee! Ask the man yonder by the fountain—the one with the striped coat and the long beard; he is one of them."

It was truly a grievous thing for a Jew to mix

"HE TALKED FREELY WITH FOREIGNERS."

familiarly with a Gentile rabble; the touch of the unwashed hand, of garments defiled with idol-

atry, nay, the very breath of the ungodly, laden

"'MY CHILD, OH, MY CHILD!'"

perchance, with foul blasphemies against the elect of Jehovah—ah, it was loathly, horrible!

The young Prophet of Galilee, it is true, had thus far seemed strangely indifferent to the stringent fulminations of the rabbis; on more than one occasion he had actually supped with publicans and sinners; he talked freely with foreigners and idolaters—too freely for his good, decided certain of his disciples.

Was it not because of such utter indifference to law and custom that they were now forced to retire to this obscure mountain village? It was their manifest duty to set their faces like a flint against the strenuous tide of the ungodly, which already threatened to sweep them away to a swift and certain destruction.

"If this man be the Messiah," they whispered one to another, "He is the Messiah not of the Gentiles, but of Israel."

So it was that when Maia, trembling, wild-eyed, imploring, ventured to pluck the sleeve of one of these wise and prudent followers of the Nazarene, crying out that her child was dying, devil-possessed and tormented, she met with an answer short, sharp, decisive. "The anointed

son of David hath neither mercy nor favor for such as thou, daughter of the accursed. Get thee hence!"

But Maia set her white teeth hard. "I will

"'HOLD THY PEACE, IDOLATER,' CRIED ONE OF THEM!"

take my answer from none save the Healer," she said. "My child—oh, my child!"

After a little, the observing crowd divided before her, staring curiously at her wild eyes and streaming hair. "Let be," they whispered; "perchance the man will come forth to her when he hears."

The disciples of the Nazarene came presently to the house where lodged their Master, the woman still following, wailing piteously from out the depths of her anguish and despair.

"Hold thy peace, idolater," cried one of them, turning upon her fiercely; "wouldst thrust thyself unbidden into his very presence, like the accursed dog that thou art?"

But she caught the man by the garment. "For the love of the gods, kind sir!" she cried, "for the sake of her that bore thee in anguish, mercy, mercy for my child—my little child!"

And with that, being quite beside herself with misery, she pushed by him into the house. Then at last she knew that she had found him. Nay, more; she knew that she had found healing, comfort, love, rest. She fell at his feet, her asking eyes fastened upon his face.

"O Lord, thou son of David," she faltered, "my child is sorely tormented, tormented."

His quiet eyes rested full upon the piteous figure, but he answered her never a word.

"Dog!" muttered Judas beneath his breath,

and he thrust his scowling face betwixt the two. "Send her away, Lord; she crieth after us."

"TRUTH, LORD, YET THE DOGS EAT OF THE CRUMBS."

"Lord, help me!" wailed the pleading voice of the mother.

Then he spoke very quietly, his eyes, burning

with a strange and awful light, fixed not upon the kneeling woman at his feet, but upon the grim, self-righteous faces of the men beside her. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and to cast it to—dogs."

He had but spoken their inmost thought, yet they trembled at his tone and look.

But Maia smiled; she remembered with a great throb of joy that "the little house-dogs" were not the starving, masterless curs of the streets. "Truth, Lord," she said, her voice ringing glad and sweet in the ears of the abashed disciples. "Truth, Lord, yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their master's table!"

Then Jesus answered her, "Oh, woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt."

That night a little child slept peacefully, rosy, dimpled, flower-smooth to the touch of the passionate, trembling fingers of the woman who knelt beside the bed.

"My child, oh, my child!" she whispered; "He hath given me the children's bread."

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